

Boston Recorder.

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 22, 1844.

REPORTED FOR THE BOSTON RECORDER.

PRES. HOPKINS'S LECTURES BEFORE THE
LOWELL INSTITUTE,
ON REVEALED RELIGION.

TENTH LECTURE.

The Credibility of the books of the New Testament.

The first argument which Dr. H. adduced for the credibility of these books, was, their *authenticity*. This he had dwelt upon in the last lecture. The fathers did not quote so largely from those books because they were written by the apostles, but because they were true, and of permanent authority.

2. These books are credible it was urged, because the authors of them had the best possible means of knowing the facts which they state. For the most part, they had a personal knowledge of them.

3. The number of witnesses was presented as another evidence of the truth of the events recorded in the books of the New Testament. The argument under this head was short, but conclusive.

4. The evidence of credibility was increased, by the peculiar testimony given by the authors of these books. Men who in that day should attempt to propagate an exclusive religion, that was entirely opposed both to Judaism and Heathenism, and also to the natural passions and inclinations of men, would be obliged to undergo labor and suffering in proportion to their sincerity and earnestness. Thus the New Testament writers did labor and suffer, and *solely* in consequence of their belief of what they wrote; and their credibility as historians is fully confirmed. Other evidence was here introduced.

5. Our books are worthy of credit, because it can be shown, that their authors were neither deceivers nor deceived. The alternative, that unless Christ and his apostles were what they claimed to be, they were either impostors or dupes, was first presented by Pascal; and since his time the whole question has been often argued under it. The only questions that can be asked respecting a witness are, Is he competent, i. e. is he well informed? and is he honest? Does he know the truth, and will he tell it? It was shown to be absurd to suppose, that those who taught a morality more perfect than any other ever known, and exemplified that morality by lives of great purity, simplicity, and self-denial, and enforced it by the most terrible sanctions of a future state, should, without any attainable worldly advantage, die as martyrs, in a position of that system, knowing it to be false. Moreover, if they were deceivers, they must have been so by combination and conspiracy. But it is morally impossible that, under the temptations which we have assumed them to have without, and in the dissections, which, by their own confession, sprung up among themselves, such a combination of falsehood should have held together. Neither could they have been deceived. This was proved from the nature of the facts, and from their character, as indicated by their writings. The facts were such as could be tested by the senses;—healing the sick, giving sight to the blind, raising the dead. Then the writings of these men show no signs of weakness or enthusiasm, but are marked with great good sense and sobriety.

6. Dr. H. next adduced the argument of The object of Leslie was to show, that the matter of fact stated in the New Testament could not have been received at the time unless they were true, and that the observations or ordinances of the Christian religion could not have existed, except in connection with the facts. In showing this, he lays down four rules: (1.) That the matter of fact be such that man's outward senses may be judges of it. (2.) That it be done publicly, in the face of the world. (3.) That not only public monuments be kept up in memory of it, but that outward actions be performed. (4.) That such monuments and such observances be instituted, and commence from the time that the matter of fact was done. The application of these rules to the subject in hand was shown.

7. Our books are credible, said Dr. H., because there are no others. It was shown to be impossible that such a movement as Christianity must have been, involving new institutions, &c., should have drawn forth no written documents; and equally impossible, that the true accounts should have perished, and that false ones should have been substituted.

8. Our books are credible because they contain accounts of such miracles. The peculiarity of the Gospel miracles was shown, and proved to be as different from all other pretended miracles, as the morality of the Gospel is distinct from that of all other systems.

There was another department on which the speaker had not touched, viz. the evidence to be derived from heathen writers, and from other sources. He must notice this evidence, because there were those who attached to it peculiar importance. The Jewish, the Grecian, and the Roman literatures, had descended by an uninterrupted channel of transmission, to modern times, and these three, by a most extraordinary combination of circumstances were brought together to elucidate the origin of Christianity. Of Hebrew literature, we have the Talmud, a collection of Jewish Traditions which were committed to writing about the middle of the 2d century. Of Greek literature we have Josephus, who though a Jew by birth and association, yet wrote in Greek. And of the Latin writers there were several, as Plutarch, Eusebius, Tertullian, Tacitus, and Fliny. Upon the literature of these three nations Dr. H. based an elaborate argument, showing that the several writers confirmed in every essential particular, the facts of Christianity.

There was another species of evidence to which he could barely allude,—it was that derived from ancient coins, medals, and inscriptions. These, dating back as far as the Christian Era, and bearing the record of many of the leading facts of the Gospel history, were a strong confirmation of these facts.

Thus, said Dr. H., we have every conceivable species of historical proof, both external and internal; and, he asked, if there may be such a thing as a weak and obstinate credulity, may there not also be such a thing as a skepticism equally weak and obstinate?

The Germans.—Germans are to be found every where; go where you will and you meet with them. Our own country in every nook and corner abounds with them. The South as well as the West is filling up with them. Who would have thought that in Mobile, Alabama, Germans could be found in sufficient number to constitute a religious congregation, yet such is the fact.

THE SABBATH.

It is refreshing to perceive the awakened zeal of the friends of order and of God, in various parts of our country, in defence of the widely violated sanctity of the holy Sabbath. Scarcely an exchange paper reaches us, which brings not with it an "olive leaf" that gives assurance of the abatement of the waters of desolation which have rolled so long and furiously over this earliest and most essential of Divine institutions. One of the most recent of these several tokens of God's continued favor toward our guilty land is found in the address of a Sabbath Convention lately held at Columbus to the citizens of Ohio, through a Committee, of which Dr. Beecher was chairman. It exhibits a condensation of fact and argument, of exhortation and appeal which is rarely met with on any subject, and which will disappoint no expectations that may be excited by finding the name of Dr. B. appended to it. The physical, moral, social and political evils flowing from the desecration of the day, are briefly yet graphically sketched; and the appropriate means of reaching and removing them, indicated with great clearness and force; while a solemn and affecting appeal is made to all in high stations and to Christians of all denominations, to churches and pastors, to the patriot and the philanthropist, to come up to the rescue of the holy day from profanation. Reliance is had on moral means alone, to remove a great moral evil; no new enactment nor enforcement of old ones is contemplated of course; "we have not the madness to think of coercing our state or nation to keep the Sabbath;"—our hope is, that by the blessing of God, we may persuade men.

This is the true ground of proceeding on in moral subjects—the only ground that heaven approves and succeeds. And this ground, firmly taken, and faithfully maintained in dependence on God, by the great mass of those who acknowledge their own, and the obligations of all men to remember the Sabbath and keep it holy, will ensure the triumph of the cause over whatever opposition it may encounter from earth or hell.

(We briefly noticed last week, a book on the history, &c. of the Westminster Assembly of Divines. We are happy to be able to notice this week a series of articles of the same general subject, from another source. They were prepared recently in the form of commemorative discourses, and our solicitation, are now published in numbers with slight modifications, adapting them to general readers.)

ORIGIN, CHARACTER, AND LABORS, OF THE WESTMINSTER ASSEMBLY OF DIVINES.

Events that preceded and led to the calling of the Assembly.

Two hundred years are now completed since, in one of the halls of Westminster Abbey, that noted Assembly of divines was convened, which framed the summary of Christian doctrine for the use of the young, termed "the Westminster Assembly's Catechism." Perhaps no human compilation of the same length ever embodied more truth—the fruit of more knowledge of the Scriptures and genuine religious feeling—than this. It has exerted a more wide, permanent, and blessed influence, and successive rising generations, than the one hundred and seven questions and answers, with the Scripture references, which compose it.

The English reformation under Henry the 8th, in 1533, was as unlike the reformation in Germany and Switzerland, occasioned under God by the labors of Luther and Calvin, as can be imagined. The main idea of the reformation, was to bring the Church of England into line, in opposition to justification by the church or by human merits. It has in its great features a religious movement, and were it to occur in our day among the Catholics of Ireland, would be called a revival of religion.

The English reformation, on the contrary, was a political movement. The British monarch, a prince of great energy and ungenerous passions becoming irritated at the conduct of the Pope in respect to the divorce of his wife, sent a messenger in a moment the ties which united the English church with the Roman pontiff. Yet the old religion was for the most part retained; those who thought differently from the king on religious subjects were persecuted, and sometimes capitally punished; and the main difference between the new and the old order of things, was that Henry VIII, instead of the Pope of Rome, was now the supreme head of the British church. A hundred years passed away, and though the reformation in doctrine had advanced, yet that unreformed hierarchy remained, in its unscriptural constitution and its alliance with the state, a clog to vital religion, and a just subject of complaint to all who sought the progress of Christ's kingdom.

In connection with this state of things, errors in doctrine,—either monstrous perversions of the doctrines of grace or the issues of a heated zeal unguided by knowledge, had sprung up, and were literally swarming in the land. The number of sects which appeared cannot easily be enumerated, as many of them had only an ephemeral existence, and are only mentioned incidentally by the writers of the times. The general tendency was to discard all regular authority in the church, and to set at naught all religious ordinances, as a hindrance to the impulses of the Spirit by which they professed to be favored. Of all these sects only two have come down to our times, and they diverged of their extravagancies. A writer of that age has given a catalogue of more than 200 errors held and defended by one or more of the sects which sprung up. He remarks, that seldom will you find one of these sects confined to a single error. They are strangely and confusedly mixed together. He says, that it is not uncommon to find, in some one Society, some of almost all these opinions, such as Arianism, Antinomianism, Manifestarianism, Libertines, Socinians, Millenarianism, &c. &c., and often the same person will be infected with the errors of many sects. To enumerate them all would be tedious and unprofitable. A few will be sufficient. Among them were the following:

That no man is cast into hell, for any sin, but only because God would have it so.

That the soul dies with the body, and every thing has an end but God, who remaineth forever.

That the histories, and even the proper names of Scripture, are all allegories.

That we cannot look for much from a Christ crucified at Jerusalem, 1600 years ago; but it must be a Christ formed in us.

That Christ died only for past sins before the Gospel was revealed.

That Christ shall come and live again upon the earth, and for a thousand years reign visibly, as an earthly monarch, all over the world, in outward glory and pomp, putting down all empires and kingdoms.

That if a man by the Spirit knows himself to be in a state of grace, if he count murder or adultery, it is no sin.

That God loves his children as well, sinning or praying.

That after conversion, Christians should not be grieved for their sins; that what Peter did when he sinned, was owing to the weakness of his faith.

That there is no hell, but in this life, consisting in fear, remorse, &c.

That to Christians, all days are alike; and there is no obligation to keep the Lord's day.

That there should be no ministry; but every one should preach that is moved to it.

That it is as lawful for women to preach as men.

That children are not bound to obey ungodly parents.

That all war, however necessary for defence, is unlawful.

That it is not lawful for a Christian to accept the office of a magistrate.

That parents should not catechise their children, nor teach them to pray.

That there are no specimens of the errors which prevailed; but they are sufficient to show that "almost every form of error prevalent in our times, existed centuries ago; and that in heresy, it would be hard to find any thing entirely new." We are not to be surprised, therefore, when perversions of the gospel spring up, as though some "strange thing" had happened to us, nor when delusions of the adversary for a time attract followers, should we feel alarmed or concerned. These have been presented to the church every age, designed in part to remove from it unworthy members, and in part to test its faith and courage, and stability and zeal.

Such was the state of things in Great Britain, which led the English parliament in June 1643, to pass a bill which had been under consideration more than a year and a half, for calling the Westminster Assembly. "It is entitled, an ordinance of the Lords and Commons in Parliament assembled, for the calling of an Assembly of learned and pious divines and others, to be consulted with by parliament, for settling the government and liturgy of the church of England, and for vindicating and clearing of the said church from false aspersions and interpretations."

The ordinance itself is as follows:—"Whereas amongst the infinite blessings of Almighty God upon this nation, none is or can be more dear to us than the purity of our religion; and for that, as yet, many things remain in the liturgy, discipline and government of the church, which do necessarily require a further and more perfect reformation than as yet have been obtained; and whereas it hath been declared and resolved by the Lords and Commons assembled in Parliament, that the present church government, by archbishops, their chancellors, commissaries, deans and chapters, archdeacons and other ecclesiastical officers depending upon the hierarchy is evil, and justly offensive and burdensome to the kingdom, a great impediment to reformation and growth of religion, and very prejudicial to the state and government of this kingdom; and whereas they are resolved, that the same shall be taken away, and that such a government shall be settled in the church as may be most agreeable to God's holy word, and most apt to procure and preserve the peace of the church at home, and nearer agreement with the church of Scotland and other reformed churches abroad; and for the better effecting hereof, and for the vindicating and clearing of the doctrine of the church of England from all false aspersions and aspersions, it is thought fit, and necessary to call an assembly of learned, pious and judicious divines, to be consulted with some members of both houses of Parliament, to be consulted with and advise of such matters and things touching the premises, as shall be proposed unto them, by both or either of the houses of Parliament, and to give their advice and counsel therein, to both or either of said houses, when and as often as they shall be required to do so. Be it therefore ordained, &c., and here follows the enactment concerning the Assembly.

In accordance with this ordinance 63 divines named in the bill, selected by the Parliament from every part of England, on account of their learning and piety met in the Abbey Church in Westminster, on the first day of July, 1643. In the presence of a great congregation, the prolocutor, Dr. Twisse, opened the meeting with a sermon from John 14:18. "I will not leave you comfortless." The members of the Assembly being seated in a smaller room, called Hensley Hall, where the deliberations were carried on, and debates were subsequently carried on. Their sessions, which were held on every week day except Saturday from 9 o'clock in the morning to 2 or 3 in the afternoon, were opened and closed with prayer, by the prolocutor. The whole Assembly was divided into three committees of twenty members on each, who met in the afternoon, took a portion of what was proposed by Parliament, prepared matters for the Assembly, and set down their minds in distinct propositions, bearing the propositions with texts of Scripture. These were then debated in the Assembly, and either accepted or rejected.

A DIVIDED HOUSE.

Bishop Odo, thinking himself mal-treated by his brother, was in the matter of Mr. Carey's ordination, has issued a remonstrance, protest and demand. His language is,

"The undersigned hereby, in the name of God and of the Holy Church, demands of his said brethren, the Right Reverend Philander Chase, D. D., Bishop of Illinois, the Right Reverend John Henry Hopkins, D. D., Bishop of Vermont, and the Right Reverend Charles Pettit McVane, D. D., Bishop of Ohio, that if they are honestly persuaded that the undersigned is justly liable to the charges which they have brought or instigated against him, they do forthwith, agreeably to the Canon of the General Convention, elected at the City of New York, present their grievances to the said Convention, and if they are mistaken accusers, which he justly suspects to do, the undersigned will feel himself fully justified in regarding the accusations as withdrawn, and demanding that they be more repeated."

This is but an extract. In some remarks following the protest &c., Bishop O. complains of his brethren as having "passed by the regular mode of impeachment," as "publicly assailing him for his solemn official acts," subjecting him to "peculiar vigilance," &c. He talks of "evil principles which appear to be strengthening," of "infidel, heretical, and schismatical influences which are now at work in a curious manner," of his "dear brethren, clergy and laity," of the "spiritual character" singular indeed. Bishop Odo, having sanctioned doctrines and measures essentially popish and of course heretical and corrupting, and having thus by his "solemn official acts," given the nod of approval to the hand of fellowship to the "Scarlet Lady," and with her abominations, is panic-struck, at the approach of "schismatical influences," and talks of "peculiar vigilance," &c.

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